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(54) Fire retardent fabrics

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SPECIFICATION

Fire retardant fabrics

5 This invention relates to fire retardant fabrics.

Textile fibres have been produced which have useful fire retardant properties. Among such fibres are aramid fibres, such as Nomex (RTM), modacrylic fibre, fire retardant polyester fibres, and fire retardant viscose fibres, which are fire retardant because of properties inherent in the polymer of which they are comprised or by virtue of additives to the melt or solution from which they are spun.

The available fire retardant fibres have different fire retardant characteristics and also differ in other properties such as wear resistance, strength, handle and dimensional stability. Fire retardant fabric components – which by and large are yarns for weaving and knitting – can be made from blends or mixtures of fibres. The selection of fibres to make up a blend is based on a number of factors and is usually a compromise between performance and cost. The high cost of a pure aramid yarn can be reduced considerably by blending the aramid fibres with fire retardant viscose fibres, for example without too much loss of wear resistance and with little reduction in fire retardant performance.

The present invention is concerned with fabrics made from mixtures of fibres and provides specifically improved fibre mixtures as well as improved ways of using such mixtures to make fabrics.

The invention comprises a fire retardant fabric comprising a mixture of three different fibres each of which is selected from a different one of the group consisting of aramid fibre, modacrylic fibre, fire retardant polyester fibre and fire retardant viscose fibre.

It is noted that while all such fabrics will possess at least the fire retardant properties that would be expected of the mixture of fibres, at least some fabrics can have fire retardant properties enhanced even over those of any of the individual fibres. Clearly some synergism operates. However, the manner of its operation is not apparently straightforward.

It is found that a fabric which is fabricated from two different yarns, each of which comprises fibres from at most two of said group, can have substantially improved properties as compared to such a fabric made from a single yarn comprising all the fibres in the same proportions by weight as the two different yarns taken together.

Such a fabric can be fabricated from two different yarns each of which comprise aramid fibre, especially yarns comprising at least 50% by weight of aramid fibre. Such a fabric comprising a first yarn consisting of 65% aramid fibre and 35% fire resistant viscose fibre and a yarn consisting of 50% aramid fibre and 50% modacrylic fibre has especially interesting fire retardant properties in that it is suitable for use in hyperbaric conditions, especially in oxygen-helium atmospheres.

The two yarns can be used as warp and weft for a woven fabric, or can be knitted either on weft or

70 tion of the fabric can be such as distributes the fibres effectively having regard to other required properties of the fabric. Thus, for example, aramid fibres of high durability can be plated on one side of the fabric which in use will be subject to wear, while modacrylic or fire retardant polyester fibres can be arranged to be predominant on the other side.

In a non-woven fabric, for example a needlefelt or stitch bonded fabric made from a mixture of fibres according to the invention, the fibres can likewise be distributed differentially in the fabric both to enhance the fire retardant properties of the fabric by having on one face a mixture having a preponderance of a certain two fibres and on the other face a different mixture.

The invention comprises, in another aspect, a method for making a fire retardant fabric comprising selecting at least three fibres from the group consisting of aramid fibre, modacrylic fibre, fire retardant polyester fibre and fire retardant viscose fibre, making at least two fabric components from different combinations of said fibres, assigning said selected fibres to said components and assembling said components into a fabric having improved fire retardant properties as compared with a fabric made from a single fabric component comprising all said selected fibres.

Said fabric components may comprise yarns from which woven, or knitted fabrics may be fabricated, or fleeces from which non-wovens can be made.

The invention also comprises a method for making a fire retardant fabric comprising selecting from known fire retardant fibres a mixture of fibres, making at least two fabric components from different combinations of said fibres, assigning said selected fibres to said components and assembling said components into a fabric having improved fire retardant properties as compared with a fabric made from a single fabric component comprising all said selected fibres.

In effect, therefore, the invention provides a method for optimising the fire retardant properties of a given blend or mixture of fibres, which itself might be selected as a compromise, for example, between cost and dimensional stability, by adjusting the distribution of the fibres between different fabric components, within any constraints imposed by reference to other desired properties such as wear resistance, comfort or sewability.

For instance, wear resistance may require a preponderance of aramid on one face of the fabric, while comfort may require a preponderance of modacrylic fibre. Sewability may require that the fabric be woven rather than knitted, especially for heavier or denser fabrics, which permits warp and weft components to be different and a weave to be chosen to expose the warp and weft differentially in opposite faces of the fabric.

Clearly, the discovery that different distributions of fibres between different fabric components yarns or fleeces, for example can lead to improved fire retardant properties as compared to making component in which the

